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THE MEDIA

A. Sperling, Godfrey  
of National Press  
club

Soc. 4-01-1 New York  
Times

P-Lisagor, Peter

CIA-05 Rostow, Walt

## Breakfast With Budge

Fourteen floors above the Washington rush hour one morning last week a score of the Capital's most influential newsmen gathered around a breakfast table in the National Press Club to feast upon the journalists' favorite delicacy: grilled celebrity. The main course this time was Oklahoma's Democratic Sen. Fred Harris, who has lately evinced a more than casual interest in becoming his party's Presidential nominee next year.

Promptly at 8:15, host Godfrey (Budge) Sperling of The Christian Science Monitor and his confreres began digging into their blueberries and cream. Then for the next 75 minutes they dug into Harris's psyche, probing—sometimes caustically, sometimes humorously—to discover the essence of his latter-day Populist political philosophy.

At 9:30, the reporters closed their notebooks and headed for their typewriters, and a perspiring and brain-drained Harris retired to the relative tranquillity of Capitol Hill. Budge Sperling himself strolled leisurely down two flights of stairs to the Monitor's twelfth-floor office. Thus ended the 241st "Breakfast With Budge," an informal but mightily influential blend of gastronomy and inquisition that has become, in the five years since Sperling inaugurated it, a Washington journalistic institution.

**Candid:** Dining-room sessions between major news sources and journalists have been a Capital commonplace for years. But what sets Sperling's breakfast club above other such gatherings are its early hour (when, Sperling thinks, public figures are apt to be more courageous, imaginative, and candid), the dazzling array of journalists in attendance and the steady stream of political luminaries and newsmakers who accept its invitations. Harris's two predecessors, for example, were Daniel Ellsberg, the source of the Pentagon papers, and Lyndon Johnson's former national security adviser Walt Whitman Rostow.

By now, the breakfasts have attained such a prestigious status that even The Washington Post's anti-Establishment critic Nicholas von Hoffman concedes grudgingly that they are "considered invaluable to political writers." And Theodore H. White, in "The Making of the President 1968," describes the group as "a closed inner circle of political reporters who link together as one of the prime transmission belts of political opinion."

**Buyers:** It is doubtful if Sperling had any such grandiose vision when he summoned a few friends one morning five years ago to join him at breakfast with Charles Percy. "I'd moved to Washington," the affable 55-year-old correspondent recalls, "and Chuck Percy came to town. He'd just made up his mind to run for the Senate, so I had a few friends in to a breakfast with him." The few friends rapidly grew to include a current enrollment of 25. And the number of breakfasts has steadily escalated. There were 82 in 1970, and so far this year there have already been 56. "In the early days," Sperling says, "I invited possible Presidential candidates whom I knew personally. I didn't think there was any particular need for these breakfasts, but other people did."

What the newsmen get out of the breakfasts seems to vary widely. For Sperling, a session "doesn't have to produce a big news story, but the reporter should go away feeling he's been enriched." Peter Lisagor of The Chicago Daily News sums things up more acidly. "The guests go because they are on the make," he says. "We know they're on the make, and they know we know. They've got something to sell and they know we're going to be pretty discriminating buyers."